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WESTERN EUROPE REVIEW

8 November 1978

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Spain: The Socialists Weigh Their Options--No More
Mr. Nice Guy?

A significant change in the outlook of Spanish Socialist leader Felipe Gonzalez seems to have taken place during the past year. Though in public he still clamors for early legislative elections and proclaims his eagerness to take over the reins of government, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] in a recently released report he seems preoccupied with the pitfalls that would await a Spanish leftist party that attains power prematurely. The Socialists' practical options are limited, of course, since Prime Minister Suarez still has the initiative and parliamentary arithmetic is such that they have little prospect of forcing an early election. Nevertheless, Suarez is currently reviewing his options for the decisions he must make after the constitutional referendum on 6 December, and the attitude of the Socialist Party could play an important role in those decisions.

In the heady days following their surprisingly strong showing in the parliamentary election in June 1977,* the Socialists began to work out a scenario for taking power. Buoyed by public opinion polls that showed them overtaking and then surpassing Suarez' Democratic Center, the Socialist leaders called for municipal elections. Because of their superior grassroots organization and local popularity, the Socialists expected to sweep most, if not all, of the major cities. This "popular mandate," they reasoned, could then be used to apply pressure on Suarez to call a national election as soon as the new constitution was ratified.** According to the Socialist

*The Socialists won 28.5 percent of the vote; Suarez' Union of the Democratic Center won 34 percent.

**The Socialists have consistently maintained that the current parliament's mandate should expire when it has succeeded in putting the new constitution into effect.

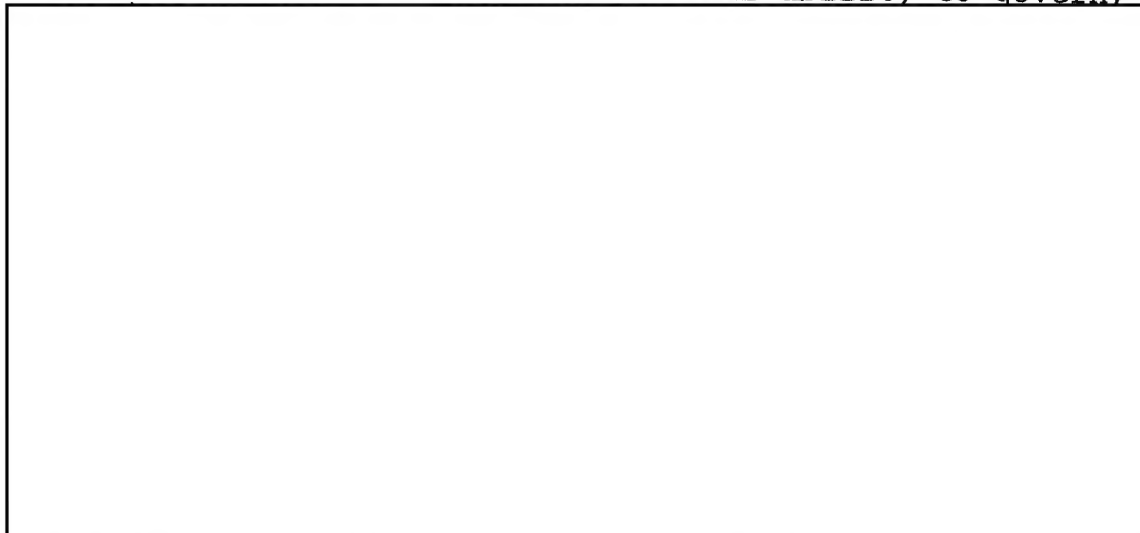
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blueprint, the Socialists' momentum would carry over from the municipal to the national polls, giving them a plurality that they could parlay into a majority coalition by coopting the left wing of Suarez' party.*

Doubts Creep In

In public statements and in sessions with US Embassy officials, Socialist leaders continue to voice confidence in this scenario and in their ability to govern.



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Fundamentally, Felipe Gonzalez is beginning to doubt that the Socialists could govern effectively. They recognize that they are highly unlikely to win an absolute majority, and various factors have shaken their faith in their ability to coopt the left wing of Suarez' party. They have ruled out an alliance with the Communists.

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and they have no other natural allies in parliament. The only other possibility--forming a minority government--would place the Socialists in an untenable position; the establishment, the financial institutions, and the military would in all likelihood oppose many of their policies, while the moderation forced on a party in power would feed the discontent among the Socialist rank and file.

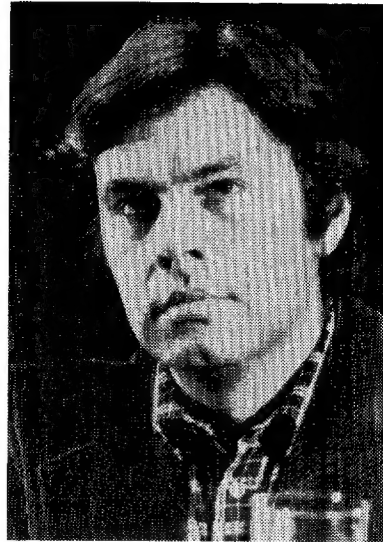
*In Socialist mythology, Suarez' "party" is a fractious collection of disparate political factions held together only by the attraction of being in power.

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A Crucial Rift

Late last month, the party brought some of these issues out into the open by publishing Secretary General Felipe Gonzalez' 43-page report, The Spanish Socialist Workers Party and the Democratic Process. In this report, Felipe Gonzalez frankly acknowledges the rift in the party between grassroots activists and the leadership--a rift caused by a confrontation between "the ideological heritage produced by years of struggle against the dictatorship" and the need to reach a political accommodation in the Spain of today. "The first issue to resolve," says Gonzalez, "is whether or not the party is prepared to govern." He goes on to detail the obstacles that must be overcome: the party has no "government strategy," nor has it the organization to disseminate such a program; the resulting lack of contact between party militants and a Socialist government "would form the greatest danger such a government would have to face." As an example, Gonzalez points to the government's current austerity program, which has been condemned by Socialist militants. He notes that a Socialist government would have to carry out a similar program. He also refers to the process of drafting the new constitution--a process "almost totally misunderstood" by the party rank and file. Gonzalez makes the usual demands for municipal and national elections, but he makes clear that the leadership is aware that much work remains to be done before the party will be ready to shoulder the responsibility of winning.



Socialist leader Felipe Gonzalez

Other Divisions

Even the Socialist leadership seems badly divided, particularly in some areas of foreign and defense policies.

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The official party line is pro-European and focuses on joining the EC, but there is a strong undercurrent of sympathy for Third World countries that frequently leads to a support for radical government that can prove embarrassing.*



Young Socialists in Malaga rebelling against Felipe Gonzalez' "moderate" line

The same ambivalence is apparent on defense issues. The party is united in opposing Spanish membership in NATO, but divided over its stand on the bilateral treaty that allows the United States to use certain Spanish military bases. Many Socialists are viscerally opposed to the treaty, which they consider a symbol of Washington's involvement with the Franco regime. Felipe Gonzalez and some other party leaders, however, are increasingly aware of how hard it is to defend the party's alternative proposals--Spanish armed neutrality or Spanish participation in a new network of bilateral European military alliances. They are now toying with the notion of acquiescing in a renewal of the bilateral treaty with the United States in 1981 as an alternative to joining NATO.

The Other Side of the Ledger

If, in spite of these misgivings, Socialist leaders continue to call for an end to consensus politics and early elections, the reason is to be found not just in the need to maintain a facade but also in compelling tactical considerations:

*Last spring, Socialists hastily backed down on their support for Algeria when Algeria began to stir up trouble for Spain over the Canary Islands.

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- Postponing the elections probably favors Suarez, giving him more time to build his party organization and more time to achieve economic results with his austerity program.
- Opinion polls indicate the Socialists will win up to 40 percent of the vote; they may never have a better shot.
- Many Socialists remain convinced they can win an absolute majority or, at least, coopt enough legislators to govern effectively. Most members of the party's Executive Committee reportedly favor elections now.
- Most important, the Socialists feel they must escape the stifling confines of consensus politics where, in the words of Gonzalez' report, they are repeatedly sandwiched between government initiatives and the "unconditional support" given to the government by the Communists "in order to gain ground and diminish the role of the Socialists."

Socialist resentment over constantly being in a "me-too" position vis-a-vis the Communists has been highlighted in recent months by a bitter press campaign. Socialist leaders have taken every opportunity to inveigh against the Communists--who are portrayed as opportunists playing a role disproportionate to their small share of the vote--and against the "unholy" "Italian-style" alliance between Communists and government.

Still, the initiative rests with Suarez. Although the new constitution provides that a government can be overthrown on a vote of censure in the lower house, it is unlikely that the Socialists could put together the necessary absolute majority. Suarez controls 165 votes in the 350-seat house, and the Socialists would have to

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get Communists, the rightist Popular Alliance, and various regional parties on board. Both Communists and rightists have their own reasons for wanting to avoid early elections.



1. Felipe Gonzalez: "Every day we are closer to power."
2. Felipe Gonzalez: "Every day we are closer to the alternative (government)."
3. Tierno Galvan (President of the Socialist Party and Socialist candidate for Mayor of Madrid): "Every day we are closer to the mayor's office."
4. Prime Minister Suarez: "Every day we are further away from the elections."

What Are the Implications?

Behind their facade of confidence, the Socialists seem to be wavering over the central question of whether they really are ready for national power.



Adding to the Socialists' uncertainty is the possibility that Suarez will choose to preempt the promised municipal elections* with national elections, thus upsetting the Socialists' strategy of building momentum and confidence from the ground up and thereby giving the Center a better chance.**

*The government has pledged to hold municipal elections within 95 days of the promulgation of the new constitution.

**At the national level Suarez' men are better known and, according to opinion polls, Suarez himself remains the candidate most Spaniards would prefer to see running the country.

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On balance, it seems likely that the Socialist leadership will be swayed by the concerns expressed in Gonzalez' report. They will not be as eager as they sound for an early national election--although they will insist on holding the local contests. Suarez may be able to use this wavering of Socialist confidence to drive a bargain with them: early municipal elections in return for at least another year of consensus politics--or something close enough to it to allow passage of enabling legislation for the constitution's most controversial provisions and to provide for another year of relative labor peace.



Felipe Gonzalez and Prime Minister Suarez

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The Socialist leadership will undoubtedly come under pressure from party radicals to turn further leftward, but in disassociating himself from Marxism earlier this year, Felipe Gonzalez has already shown that his sights are firmly set on the left-center vote. Thus, the Socialists will waste no opportunity to criticize the government, but behind the scenes they will reach agreements with Suarez--as they did on the constitution. For one thing, this is the most effective way to freeze out Santiago Carrillo's Communists. Further accommodation with the government, of course, will increase the party's problems with its rank and file, and the leadership, taking leaf from Carrillo's book, will probably step up its efforts to persuade militants that the party's line is correct. Despite such efforts, discontent at the base will remain a nagging problem. Gonzalez and his associates probably calculate, however, that the militants have nowhere to go unless the Communists swing back to the left--and that even then most Socialist radicals would balk at joining their longtime rivals.

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EC Enlargement: Institutional Choices and Negotiations

The EC foreign ministers, at their semiannual retreat late last month in Gymnich, set a brisk pace for negotiations with Greece, Portugal, and Spain on EC membership. They also moved to protect the present balance of power among the Nine and between the member states and EC institutions.

Majority Voting

The ministers agreed that, when Greece joins the EC, decisions in the Council of Ministers can still be vetoed by any two of the four largest member states. These countries--the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, and Italy--also want to ensure that even after Portugal and Spain enter the EC, a "blocking minority" in the Council will require no more than the votes of two such states.

Their determination may sharpen the concern of some small EC states, as well as the Commission, who oppose the domination of the Community by a "directoriate" of its most powerful members.

The Three Wise Men

French President Giscard has proposed that the EC set up a committee of "wise men" to study the full implications of enlargement for the Community. Despite concern that Giscard intends his plan to slow down the enlargement process, to bring into question the powers of EC institutions, or to muffle the voice of the smaller states, the foreign ministers agreed that such a committee should be established by the European Council in December.

The ministers stipulated that the committee should review the whole range of EC institutional problems and that its report should not appear before June 1979, when Greece's membership negotiations should be formally complete.

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The foreign ministers are considering several formulas for committee participation. One plan calls for the participation of a representative from a large EC state, one from the Benelux countries, and one from the states that joined the EC in 1973; another includes one representative from each of the main EC institutions--the Commission, the Parliament, and the Court of Justice. The French will resist the latter plan, which would protect the present role of these institutions in the EC.

EC Enlargement

The EC ministers reaffirmed that they intend to complete substantive negotiations for Greek membership by the end of this year. The main obstacles to this goal are the Community's insistence on a transition period of five to seven years before free trade in agriculture is established and West German resistance to the free movement of Greek workers into the Community.

Contrary to rumors that the Community would delay for some time its decision to open negotiations on Spanish membership, the ministers agreed to make that decision this year following a Commission report in late November on Spain's application.

The Community has already begun accession talks with Portugal and is speeding up preparations for political cooperation.

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